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National Ceremony - commemorative address 2015

HIS EXCELLENCY GENERAL THE HON SIR PETER COSGROVE AK MC (RETD), GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

We gather under the Australian sun, here in Canberra, at a noble place. Here on this forecourt, framed by the Australian War Memorial behind me and with our Parliament squarely beyond at the end of this magnificent Anzac Avenue, we gather in this noble place to commemorate events so far away, so long ago: the Gallipoli landings 100 years ago on this very day.

We can imagine the months of Australia's war leading up to this day a century ago. The speeches, the rush to join our expeditionary forces, the tearful farewells, churches full of anxious and earnest invocations. Ships sailing and bands playing. A great sense of exhilaration tinged with trepidation pervading all parts of our new nation. Overarching all this was this sense of duty to Empire, to "kith and kin", a determination that "Australia will be there!"

Of course in the Australia of 1914 and 15, there were plenty of good people who did not want us to go to war but the vast majority felt a sense of obligation, a kind of "noblesse oblige". And so the flower of our youth put on Army Khaki or Navy Blue and sailed off to war. For many it was a relief – to finally be going, to be finished with sad farewells, to share the journey with mates old and new, to travel to the other side of the world and even, to not miss the excitement of what was hoped to be a short and triumphant war.

For all of them, there was not a speck of knowledge amongst them about what they would encounter, what they would endure, what their fate would be. There are so many worthy and persuasive accounts of the reasons for World War I, of the need or inevitability for conflict, of mistakes and mis-judgements and mis-readings and these are all important views, reflections, facts, for us to consider and comprehend if we wish, but they are all less relevant today. For today is not so much about war writ large but about people – the people we mourn and venerate: the Anzacs, the men and women of Australia and New Zealand who served in World War I and whose great trials were signaled by this day 100 years ago; and it is also about the peoples of Australia and New Zealand now and in the future for whom commemoration should

peoples of Australia and New Zealand now and in the future for whom commemoration should never be by rote, for whom such earlier sacrifices must contribute to our future greatness.

Imagine for a moment the atmosphere aboard the ANZAC troop ships sitting off the Gallipoli Peninsula in the predawn hours 100 years ago. Such nobility of purpose as had been engendered back in Australia and New Zealand, no doubt reinforced continually on the long voyage would by now have been swamped by the uncertainty, the fear as the troops prepared for the short journey to those brooding Turkish shores.

By now it would have been starkly apparent that as a fighting force they had only their leaders and each other and that each individual had only their courage, their pride and a sense of obligation to their comrades. This was the armour they wore ashore in the landings at Gallipoli. This was the armour that sustained them unto death or disability and for those who survived, for the horrible bloodletting in Europe and the Middle East in the years that followed. One might add to that a growing realisation that being an Australian or a New Zealander stood for something at Gallipoli and in those other later killing fields - this too, rather more than notions of a clash of empires and affronted values, was the reason why these men and women of our nations endured as their numbers grew fewer and fewer.

In doing so, they showed a greatness which was their true nobility. This was not the conventional perspective of nobility popularised in jingoistic and pseudo-spiritual terms - "glorious death, for King and country, God with us" et cetera. For at every hand for many of them was the gruesome carnage of modern war - countless dead, comrades maimed, brothers and neighbours psychologically ruined. For all the genuine heroes they had their share of miscreants. Their nobility though was that they stayed together, clung to each other and to the memory of home, the idea of home and they found that that sustained them. The outcome was that they revealed to the world that Australia and New Zealand were nations of values supported by men and women of the greatest character.

The Anzacs and their deeds at Gallipoli and throughout the First World War have, in the eyes of some, shaped our national characters. Some scholars have asserted that this was not so and have properly spent a great deal of time and effort explaining to us that our two nations were already more developed, matured by different and wider experiences and I do not argue with them. I say to you now however that what the Anzacs did, what those marvelous, stoic men and women in uniform did, was to reveal such of our national characters as to place an eternal obligation on Australia and New Zealand to always look beyond our shores and place ourselves at the side of those in need, whatever the cost.

As families delve into their histories and uncover more and more stories of the Anzacs we are coming to understand the enormous adversity they faced and to appreciate how as ordinary, everyday people they carried themselves so admirably in the most trying circumstances imaginable.



And today, so far away, on Turkish soil, once the land of our enemy, now the home of our friend, thousands of our countrymen and women will gather reverently on the Gallipoli Peninsula. They will mourn and wonder as we do here about the significance of the day. It should be a clear and simple answer – the spirit of Anzac lies not just in a place that you visit, or a book that you read

or solely in the men and women of our Armed Forces of today. The spirit of Anzac lies in us all. Those first Anzacs gave it to all of us for the rest of time



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The Australian War Memorial

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Campbell ACT 2612
Australia

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